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Written on JUNE 24, 2014 AT 6:00 AM by SVANDERWERFF

MHS' Contribution as a Global Force for Good

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Good morning MHS Team,

Last month, the five of us embarked on a visit with medical units and combat leaders in Afghanistan. In the austere environment of this country, the Military Health System is an actor in two major missions – our combat medicine mission and the sustainment of host-nation health capacity in the era following our drawdown this summer.

With the war winding down, it is critical that we remain dedicated to gathering the lessons learned from this experience. The MHS has been exemplary in rapidly learning about what works and what does not work in our care to wounded service members, and turning that knowledge around into clinical practice in the real world. Processes for triage, patient flow, trauma care, and aeromedical evacuation have been refined and continuously improved – and now serve as the standard for our medical colleagues around the world.

As the war concludes, it is important that we codify those innovations and embed them in our education and training systems worldwide. Every one of us – whether serving overseas today or serving here at home – has a role in this effort. We need to ensure actions and instincts that are in the forefront of our thoughts today are not lost.

In looking at host-nation health capacity and capability, it is clear that the contributions of US military medical personnel have also been immense. We were moved by the commitment of not only the U.S. military, but NATO partners, non-NATO nations, the non-government organizations and – above all – the Afghan people, who have come together to support the singular mission of improving the health and system of medical care in this war-ravaged nation.

Although the principal purpose of our visit was focused on medical support to operational forces, we also had the opportunity to visit with our Afghan colleagues and witness the great strides they have made in advancing health in their own society. We visited a local Afghanistan hospital that Dr. Woodson had visited in a previous visit to the country. The singular advances of that one institution exemplified the progress being made across the nation – progress that includes remarkable reductions in maternal mortality, infant and child mortality, and increases in life expectancy.


And this visit highlighted the important work that embedded U.S. medical forces have made in supporting these advances.

Our work with the people of Afghanistan will not end this summer. We will continue to have a role, in a model that brings “whole of government” resources and expertise in sustaining and expanding their capacity to care for their citizens. This mission, as part of our global health engagement strategy, is important to our overall national security strategy and goals – and


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will be an important component of continuing to help Afghanistan grow and thrive.

To visit our medical personnel on the ground is always uplifting for us. Witnessing the pride and professionalism of these men and women reminds each of us of the MHS's contributions as a global force for good.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Woodson, M.D., assistant secretary of defense (Health Affairs)

Forrest Faison, RADM, MC, USN, deputy surgeon general

Mark Ediger, Maj Gen, USAF, MC, deputy surgeon general

Nadja West, MG, MC, USA, joint staff surgeon

Joseph Carvalho, MG, MC, USA, commander, US Army Medical Research and Material Command

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